

At Wheaton, the Crowd Had Been Surlier, Rougher

By Mabel H. Brandon

They say that no one heard the shots because the band was playing and the small core of loyal supporters were clapping next to the make-shift podium. Billy had been singing: "When you live in the country everyone is your neighbor, y'all come and see us now and then." George Wallace had stretched out his hand to his neighbor.

The troopers, with plastic face visors, the state police, the Wallace "special body guards," the Secret Service men were around him so quickly no one knew what had happened. Opposite the podium some fifty yards stood an enormous white truck with 500 rifles and dynamite inside, "just in case" as one of the body guards had winked to me.

The morning crowd in Wheaton Shopping Plaza had been larger, surlier and rougher. Now, with the sun finally breaking through the western sky, the crowd seemed smaller and friendlier. Everyone seemed more relaxed as Wallace ended his speech with his favorite closing theme; and Billy began to pluck his electric guitar...

He never campaigns on Sunday. He goes back home to recover in Montgomery and

Mrs. Brandon, a free lance writer and photographer, spent most of Monday on the campaign trail in Maryland with Governor Wallace.

today, like so many other Mondays, the schedule was in shambles. At Wheaton Big George Mangum leaned down into the mike from his bright red jacket and tried to cheer up the crowd; "He'll be with us in a few more minutes, ladies and gentlemen. He's not far away now." And then the Grand Ole Opry music would swing on in. Tunes like, "You-all Come," "Tennessee Waltz" and "I want to go Home." Grey heads moved rhythmically and some older feet stepped time, but the clenched fists were also raised and the signs went up higher. "Remember Selma." "George Wallace for President, Hitler for Vice-President" and the poster of Wallace and Shirley Chisholm on a mock-Grant Wood poster...

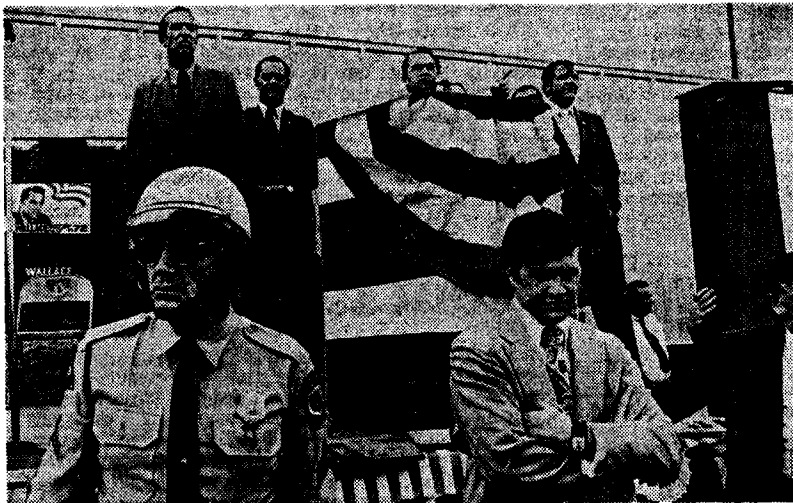
Big George explained to the restless crowd that because of some city ordinance the Wallace girls could not actually pass the hat. People would have to come forward with their dollars to help elect George. Near the front the dollars came out like new shoots from the earth, but in the back middle fingers were raised from clenched fists.

Near a photographic ladder leaned a lanky boy in jeans, one foot on the rung, one behind him. A black boy tripped against him. The white boy snarled, "Watch yourself, bitch." The black boy replied, "don't you bitch me you honky"... and moved on. As the waiting lengthened, tempers shortened everywhere and the troopers, like Caesar's giants, moved through the crowd, eyes roving...

The music ceased and the Reverend was asked to give the "blessing." He asked the crowd to bow its head in prayer. A few heads bent forward. "Father, open our hearts and minds and teach us to listen with

He told us about taxes and about Vietnam. He told the hecklers that they sure had a "limited vocabulary if the only words you know are four letter words like that," and he talked about "beauticians, policemen, farmers and small businessmen" who are being squeezed by taxation. He rose on tip-toe to assail welfare... and he cited the record of his opponents on welfare voting and the Gulf of Tonkin resolution. At the same time the shouts and hoots would occasionally pierce his train of thought and he would come up for air with a put-down; "I hear you, my friend, loud and clear."

He talked to us about crime in the streets, he told us that it wasn't safe "to walk in the shadow of the White House in the nation's capital." He said that it was a shame that



By Matthew Lewis—The Washington Post

The Governor at Wheaton Plaza.

open hearts and minds..." The words floated across bubble-gum blowing, baby-crying and snickers...

Some kids had been let out of a history class to see "democracy in action" and, in blue-jeans and beads, and one with the mask of a gorilla, they had now begun to lie down on the macadam and smoke.

Finally Big George boomed, "here he comes, ladies and gentlemen, the next president of the United States, George Wallace."

All I could hear were boos and the mike had to be lowered from Big George down to Governor George.

men and women in our free America could not walk the streets of our capital city without fear of bodily harm. He told us that some judges let criminals go back onto the streets while waiting for due process and they go back and frighten our citizens.

The windup was the same he had used so many times before. The theme he made famous and part of America '72: busing. He said that he was forcing Nixon to recognize busing as an issue and that he had even been told by some of the members of the press who were on the President's recent trip to China that Nixon and Mao had talked about busing at their meeting. Mao had said, "with us busing is no problem. If we want to bus people we just bus 'em." But President Nixon has said, "in our country we do not force our citizens to be bused if they do not choose to be bused..."

The boos and the fists followed him into his limousine and then he was away from them down the winding highway to Laurel.

In Laurel the crowd had waited more patiently. There was one white woman, married to a black man with a mulatto baby in her arms who shouted a few insults, but otherwise the crowd was quiet with occasional square dancing among the groups of kids

waiting for George. When he finally came at about three — he seemed tired and he apologized for losing his voice halfway through the speech. He said the same things, but more gently, and the crowd responded to his jokes with more laughter. They played "The Wabash Cannonball" and Cornelia looked pretty in a lemon yellow suit and she leaned against the big, black car and whispered secrets to a lady friend. George said he had to be going on now as he was due in Annapolis that night for a rally and Billy began to hum, "We're all Together." George stretched out his hand thinking "everyone was his neighbor."

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